

The Lowell Pearl

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The Lowell Pearl

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Submitting to *The Lowell Pearl*

*Please read carefully; your submission *will not* be considered if the guidelines are not adhered to.*

Our deadline is
February 30th

Please send ***TWO (2)*** copies of your submission(s); one copy with ***NO IDENTIFYING MARKS*** on it (our policy requires anonymous readings of each submission), and one copy attached to a separate cover page which lists:

- the title of your submission(s)
- your name, permanent mailing address and phone number
- a brief description of background information
- a self-addressed stamped envelope

Students who submit should give us a permanent mailing address and phone number; we may need to contact you between semesters.

Prose Writers: please submit no more than two (2) pieces of prose per deadline, as we will only accept one (1) piece of prose per author. Please— no more than 5,000 words.

Poetry Writers: please submit no more than five (5) pieces of poetry per deadline. Please— no more than four pages per poem; 5,000 words.

Visual Artists: please submit all pieces on a reproducible page; preferably 8"X10" or smaller.

Send submissions to:

The Lowell Pearl

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Table of Contents

<i>The Truth that Haunts Us</i> , by Mary Diane Hausman.....	1
<i>Footnote to a Theory</i> , by Leslie Schenk	3
<i>Like is Like</i> , by Nicholle D. Gaudet	4
<i>On Leave</i> , by R. A. Southern.....	5
<i>Letter to M.D., in Western Australia</i> , by Leslie Schenk	8
<i>Keys</i> , by Maurice Ebbs, Jr.....	9
<i>Psychocide</i> , by Elijah J. Graves.....	10
<i>A Passing of Crises</i> , by Errol Miller.....	11
<i>Without Words</i> , by Cindy L. Walker.....	12
<u><i>Girls Gone Astray</i></u> , by Susan Efros	13
<i>The Grasshopper</i> , by Mary Diane Hausman.....	24
<i>The Universe</i> , by Mahdy Y. Khaiyat	26
<i>What I Remember Is</i> , by Mary Winters.....	27
<i>How to Enter a Distracted Autumn</i> , by Brent Emerson.....	28
<i>Endsong</i> , by Wayne Cresser	29
<i>End of Power</i> , by Mahdy Y. Khaiyat	30
<i>The Time Will Be</i> , by Carol Carpenter.....	31
<i>Delivery</i> , by Carol Carpenter	32
<i>Mirror Image/Mirror Image</i> , by Mary Kennan Herbert	33
<i>Beads on a String</i> , by Leslie Schenk	34
<i>No Perfect Crossing</i> , by Errol Miller.....	35
<i>Couvade</i> , by Carl Gottesman.....	36
<i>The Wagon Bed</i> , by B. Z. Niditch	37
<i>Thanatos</i> , by Bradley Jacobsen.....	38
<u><i>Rejection Blues</i></u> , by Nelson James Dunford.....	40
<i>Ebbs Porch</i> , by Maurice Ebbs, Jr.....	44
<i>Do Unto Others...</i> , by Nicholle D. Gaudet	45
<i>Return Me</i> , by R. A. Southern	46
<i>Just a Little Piece</i> , by Elijah J. Graves.....	47
<i>Irises</i> , by Leslie Schenk.....	48
<i>Tomatoes</i> , by Carol Carpenter	49
<i>Lifting</i> , by Cindy L. Walker	50
<i>A Painful Choice</i> , by Errol Miller.....	51
<i>The Basement Horse</i> , by Cindy L. Walker	52
<i>Beethoven vs. the Exclusion Principle</i> , by Brent Emerson	53
<i>Drowning Angel-extended</i> , by Suchot Sunday	55
<i>The Skunk</i> , by Mary Winters.....	56
<i>Fury of a Man with Clock Hands Who's Slow In Grasping and Cannot Weigh a Moment</i> , by Kelly Washbourne	58
<i>The Peace Process</i> , by Kevin Carey	60
<i>Old Shoes</i> , by Elijah Graves	61

<i>Pathos</i> , by Bobbie Saunders.....	62
Three Aimless Minds on a January Night , by Mike Devigne.....	63
<i>The Educational Machine</i> , by Carl A. Gottesman.....	65
<i>To Each</i> , by Carol Carpenter.....	67
<i>Tender is the What</i> , by Brent Emerson.....	68
<i>Clock Tower in Venice</i> , by Leslie Schenk.....	69
<i>1912 Textile Worker's Strike Slogan</i> , by Gina M. Tabasso.....	70

All Artwork By: Barbara Lynn-Bolton

Dear Readers,

First of all, allow me to apologize for the huge wait for this issue to come out. The only excuse I can give is inexperience. This is the first time I've worked on such a prestigious magazine and I think the pure work load may have overwhelmed me.

But in the end I did prevail (better late than never, I guess...) and I'd like to thank all those who helped me do it and also those who so patiently worked with me. Above and beyond was the MinuteMen Press in Dedham, MA, who took the time explain the whole complicated process of getting something published right. Also I'd like to thank my staff who gave up countless hours of time they could have spent studying to read lines and lines of poetry and pages and pages of short stories. They where and continue to be the backbone and the muscle behind this fragile contraption known as the UMass Lowell Literary Society. Without them, you would not be holding this issue in your hands now. Also the members of the UMass Lowell Bookstore Committee who saw the value of this work and provided the money to publish it, and then were patient enough to hold the money until I had (finally) finished working on this.

These thank-you's and apologies aside, I would like to just explain what we do for this magazine. First we have to sort endless letters, some with submissions, others with requests, announcements, questions, and, of course, junk mail. Then, we have to read all of the submissions several times over. Finally, when we decide (sometimes after heated arguments about silly things like the definition of a poem) what we can publish, taking into consideration our audience, space, budget, and reputation, we have to put them in order and retype them all. This is made more difficult when there are revisions — and revisions of the revisions — and spelling errors in the revisions —and the same name spelt two different ways in two different places...and what seems like a million other problems that creep up just when you think you're done. This process seems to take the longest. Next, while finding time to answer the other letters (requests and questions), we have to somehow get the money in our budget to the printers to pay for the publication and, in the mean time, try not to fail our classes or get fired from our jobs. Needless to say, the Lowell Pearl is a great weight to carry, especially by volunteers.

We hope you enjoy the fruit of our labors: this book.

Dave Fallon
Editor-in-Chief



The Truth That Hunts Us
(For Camille Claudel: French Sculptress, Lover of Rodin)
by Mary Diane Hausman

Ah, Camille,
You fell for Rodin's
Soft curves,
But yours were
Far more seductive

The clay you dug
And hauled yourself
From beneath
The streets of Paris
Turned into line
Upon line and
Curve upon curve
Under your shy,
Knowing hands;

Turned into
Movement
And life
And tentative glory.

Even Rodin
Was in awe of you.
He would never tell you
Just how powerful,
How masterful
you were.

He could never admit
The possibility
Of someone,
A woman no less,
Greater than he.

Ah, Camille,
Your passion
Betrayed you.

Tossed overboard
By your own demons,
You turned a Paris corner
And never came
Quite back.

Rodin became the panoply
Of all your fears
The symbol of what you
Would never become

Because, more than Rodin,
You were afraid of
Camille.

Footnote to a Theory

by Leslie Schenk

I could regale you
with our imperfections,
enough to cause you doubts
on Darwin and survival:

even apart from war
and politics, we're clearly
not as good as we could be,
and that's not good enough;

as monkeys can't converse,
as birds make lousy strollers,
so we can't share or save;
we sell our wretched votes;

the trouble is, we fittest
settle merely to survive,
for which not good enough
is good enough, so far.

Like is Like

by Nicholle D Gaudet

Like is like
But do you know me?
Or do you just know my face
And live in my memory
Feel what I feel
Know what I know
See what I see
In me
In you
Do you know how I feel about you?
And me
Do you know what it's like
Inside
My mind
My memories
Of black
And white
Of drowning
And flying
Living
Dying
Like-
do you like?
know what I like?
see what you like?
-is like
In my mind
Nothing exists forever
Like lives but one short
Moment
And is like
Then is gone
Which is not like anymore
Like?
No more
Like is such a fickle word.

On Leave

by R. H. Southern

I crave some blueberries.
I crave a cigarette.
I've no way to blueberries.
I've way to my lighter and
Menthols.

I light up.

Green line's crowded:
Purple, plastic, grape Twizzlers
Strangled by the un-re-leas-
Ing fat hand of
A dark haired, bespeckled
Woman. She leans to and fro
As the T clatters
Along.

The man in the
Tweed
Wrinkles his nose into a
sneer as he reads of a
Teen-age suicide—

The young Adonis professional
Grins at the
Dow Jones rising—
His attaché case is never
Full.

The doors open.
The T man pulls the pin:
"Pahk Street!"
The grenade explodes

And we all, like shrapnel,
Fly to our respective
Ground

In the City.

I crave some blueberries.
I crave a cigarette.
I've no way to blueberries.
I've way to my lighter and
Menthols.

The trains move faster but
Their tracks, old, move me
Slower
Into my once small New England town.

Grandma's little shuttered
Home.

I light up.

Through jigsaw puzzles,
Crossword puzzles,
And scrabble,
She reminds me of
Bedtime.

She and Auntie go up.

I crave some blueberries.

The cuckoo chime jolts
Me up in the green wing
Chair.

I light up.

Cigarettes, an American invention,
Are new and the
Clanking of the old steam
Radiators move my
Attention about the home:

Eight framed photos on the wall,
Proud grandmother of eight—
Two framed photos on the table,
Proud great grandmother of two.

The Duguid Coat of Arms
Reminds this American soldier of
His Scottish blood.

I crave some blueberries.

My menthol's tip sinks
Steadily, rapidly to its
Butt.

The old swamp way out there—
Now, dried up—

Blueberries.

All the fruit her yard could
Bear—
Blueberries way yonder,
Blackberries yonder,
Pears, reaches, and
Apples nearby.

The petunias lay low around the
Gray house like grandma's
Pearls around her
Gray head.

I squish out my last cigarette.

I can see the blueberries on television.
I will pick and taste them

Here.

Letter to M.D., in Western Australia

by Leslie Schenk

The barrel of the Earth rolls between us.
Your spring is my autumn; your leaves
burgeon while mine detach and float.
The soles of our feet are closer than our chins.
Even our bathtubs empty in opposite whirls.
No straight glint from you can ever reach me here.

But the eyes of love know none of this.
Mine are not targets awaiting your darts,
but lighthouses, broadcasting shafts of lumens
in curves, encompassing oceans to seek you out.
And succeed, too: my spotlights ring you round
like a star on a stage. Blind, I see you.

Keys

*by Maurice
Ebbs Jr.*

A lock that has no key is in order.
The key that is lost is mindless.
An oversized key is dumbfound.
Locks that do not work are pre-destroyed.
Doors mean nothing without locks.
Lock out undesired people.
Shut the door
Lock it if you can.
Safe?
The key is under the welcome mat.

Psychocide

by Elijah J. Graves

the tears and the memories burn.
The splinters and the memories out with a blade.
but dulling now and memory worn thin.
my will breaks down and head caves in
and I don't care anymore.
mr. loneliness stopped following me.
he's so boring anyway.
thought he'd follow me one more day.
I left him at the corner.
he won't notice until he counts only two shoes.
He always looks so down.
that's cause he can't count.
two is less than four,
and two is one as far as shoes go.
but four or two is too many.
so I've been chased away.
no matter though.
I've found another corner of my mind.
It's the place where the good thoughts went,
forced out by nothing and the bad.
my brothers.
but now I'm an only child.
I need a friend.
so I've sat in the corner patiently.
I haven't made too much noise but I've been good.
loneliness doesn't bother any more.
even when there's no one around.
I still have a friend.
her shadow's in the corner even when she's not.
she visits so often it's burned right in.

A Passing of Crises

by Errol Miller

The voices are silent now,
and peace has come.

Hang out the wash again
and bake the cookies.

Smile at the doorman
and skip a prayer or two.

Look in the mirror and then
thank God that you made it.

Across the aisle, two men speak with their hands. Despite the lurch of this downtown bus, their conversation seems smooth, an easy flurry of fingers, articulating the quiet air between them.

At each early morning stop, the rush hour crowd steps from the snow-laden sidewalks where they have been waiting in the throat of the cold. The bitter air forcing hands into pockets or up to mouths, fisted against breath.

Mother warned me about extremities when I was a girl. Waiting for the school bus, I could feel her watching me through the glare of the kitchen window, as if alone on the snowy driveway, I might dare to remove my uncool mittens, the ones she had sewn.

Her hands were the busiest of all, dusting knickknacks, packing lunches, stabbing needles into wool. In the summer, thumbing through soil beneath the back yard plants, radishes, beans. At night, she messaged lilac and rose lotions around her thumbs, aloe on palms. I loved the smell of bouquets at her wrists.

As the precious space in the bus fills, I dare to seem rude, long enough to watch the deaf men finish gesturing, final words falling into laps. Long enough to wonder what my hands have to offer, whether they could speak for themselves or be known for their actions. Or when it's too late for touch to hold out the cold, how it can hold you tighter than gloves.

The first time I kissed Cat was on a Saturday in the basement laundry room of her parents' Beverlywood apartment building. During a sticky heat wave, wearing only shorts and halter tops, we stampeded barefoot down three flights, our laughter and screams ricocheting off the walls of the stairwell. And within seconds, our arms got tangled together in the warm fragrant sheets we had promised to fold for her mother; something inside of me came undone. I don't know which of us started that everlasting kiss, but when she wedged her tongue between my teeth and started moving, I felt a shudder through my whole body. The clean sheets slipped out of our hands.

"Oh my God," Cat said, and clamped her hand over her own mouth when we broke apart from the longest kiss of my life. "What have we done!"

"I know," I said, plunging into her shocking blue eyes. Then I slid my hand around her slender waist, and stroked the fine hairs at the small of her back. With a single pale finger, she traced a ticklish circle around my belly button, French kissing me all the while. I felt like hot lava about to melt into the cold linoleum beneath me.

It wasn't as if I hadn't given boys a fair chance. Ever since sixth grade, I had kissed dozens of them at spin-the-bottle parties. Whenever the Coke bottle landed on me, I would lean forward with my eyes shut, mouth puckered, and pay my dues. More recently, I had forced myself into a few prolonged make-out sessions with popular jocks in their fathers' Cadillacs, but I was disgusted by the immaturity of seventeen year old boys, with their slobbering kisses, idiotic remarks, and gross attempts to get to second base. The status I acquired being seen with these lugs wasn't worth the hassle.

A few years before Cat, I had fallen for my camp counselor, Carolyn, and my idea about kissing a girl had changed drastically. All summer long, I tortured myself by trailing after her and her boyfriend, shamelessly spying on them, even on the night that they finally did it. The farthest I ever got was holding her hand on the bus home from camp.

But Cat was like me: we both had worked-up, passionate natures that were pulled to each other by an overpowering magnetic force. We were the missing piece in one another's love puzzle. An undeniable fit.

Sports was in our blood, and that's how we got acquainted. We were the two most motivated and skilled players on our girls softball team— she a showy, fast ball pitcher, and me a loud-mouthed but dependable catcher. I was forever on the mound mapping out our next play, and she was constantly telling me what a genius I was. We also shared a love of surfing, and on a few perfect weekends, we had hitchhiked up the coast to ride the treacherous waves at Malibu.

Afterwards, sunbathing on the blistering hot white sand, slathering

each other's back with suntan oil, we compared stories about our fathers' hot tempers, our mothers' constant nagging, and our own personal concerns about what we would become.

"My parents think it's nuts to want to be an artist. They say I'll wind up with no security," I confessed while digging a giant hole in the sand. "Anyway, I don't even know if I'm good enough."

"That's dumb," Cat said. "Of course you're good enough." Then she confided: "I'm going to be a professional coach someday no matter what anyone says."

We covered every topic from softball strategies to our plans to leave home the minute we turned eighteen. Every topic, *except* boys. What a relief.

At school we frantically searched for each other between classes just to say hello. As the days turned suffocatingly hot, we began eating our lunches in the deserted cedar grove, planted between the main building and the shabby bungalows at the edge of campus. Down thirty steps, the grove provided us with brief shade and seclusion. At night, tucked into our separate beds, we whispered marathon phone calls in the dark. "I'd better get off," we each repeated several times before hanging up. By the end of a year, we were practically inseparable. But this was the first time we acted as if we were in love.

Leaning against Cat now, I listened to her heart thumping as hard as my own. When I heard the floorboards creak overhead, an invisible fist dug into my gut. I was terrified that someone would come downstairs and catch us. But Cat moved closer, kissed harder, and soon everything inside of me started to loosen, turn to mush. The truth was I had waited for this my whole life. Even though I didn't understand why I was wild about Cat, I couldn't help myself from loving a girl, anymore than I could help loving the blurred edge of watercolors, the rush that comes from hitting a grand slam, the ecstasy of shooting the curl at sunset. Cat was my destiny. Our mouths and tongues were made for each other. We were as well-matched at kissing as the Beach Boys were at singing harmony.

"You feel so amazing, Annie," she whispered in my ear, apparently unthreatened by the overhead noise. I wanted to be as brave as Cat.

"You two." I swallowed the knot in my throat, and pressed my weight against her. Her long lashes fluttered against my cheek and she tugged me in even closer. I didn't care if it was wrong. At sixteen and a half, I was loving a girl who could love me back.

When I buried my face in her neck and inhaled the mixed scent of Nivea and sweat, I felt drunk, like I could keel over.

"Annie," she whispered again, and the sound of my name on her lips made me feel like I belonged to her. She held onto me and we swayed until fell onto one of the crumpled sheets in front of the dryer.

"God, Cat, you're getting me so hot," I said, moving my hand to her soft cotton bra. I couldn't have been dizzier if I had spun in the dryer myself.

"We'd better get back or my parents will be suspicious," she said, suddenly pulling away. Then she grabbed the sheets off the floor.

"You're right," I agreed, not wanting to appear too fast or even too interested. Nothing could drive away a person quicker than desperation.

"Help me shake these out," Cat said. "They're filthy."

We folded the sheets, then peered into the cracked mirror over the sink, scrutinizing our altered expressions and raking our fingers through our rumpled hair. There was nothing we could do about our flushed faces. But even with the proper adjustments, I could see the change in me; the wild animal look in my eyes was new and wasn't going away. I wouldn't let on about the deep throbbing between my legs, not yet. Cat, looking as excited as a puppy, rested her head on my shoulder adoringly.

"Look at us!" she blurted. "We've got to act normal."

"Okay then, stop smiling," I said, and shoved her. "You never smile like that around your parents."

After that our main objective was to find places where we could hide. At school, we'd duck into the girls lavatory, stand shivering in the same cramped stall, and hold each other. If we heard someone coming we'd light up a cigarette and puff away. During lunch time we'd dart into the grove, scope out the territory, and sneak a kiss here and there in the safety of the shadows. But mostly we just stayed near each other's warm bodies, sometimes not touching at all, getting excruciatingly hot planning the details of our next meeting. We were two flaming torches, set apart from the rest of the world.

Sometimes sitting perfectly still on a redwood bench in a cool rectangle of shade, sharing an apple or a ripe peach, we wouldn't speak at all. I was content to listen to Cat chew and suck at the piece of fruit we passed back and forth. Once Cat stuck her hot hand deep into my skirt pocket and left it there. Neither of us said a word. I rested my hand on the bench just grazing her butt, and she pressed back into my palm. It was like a game, turning each other on during long concentrated periods of silence. Breathing in the spicy smell of cedar, listening to the drone of insects in the background, and feeling Cat's eyes on me, I'd become as dizzy as I had been that first day in the laundry room. Trapped in my uncomfortable straight skirt, I'd squeeze my legs together, and feel waves of pleasure rolling over me.

By now I adored just about every part of her: her pug nose, short-cropped curly black hair, deep-set blue eyes framed by thick eyebrows that made her look slightly wicked when she concentrated. I found myself constantly staring at the small dark mole at the corner of her mouth and the delicate gold cross at her throat. Even her chewed-up nails fascinated me. I would have been her slave if she'd asked me.

All my friends seemed ridiculously immature, now. I could barely relate to Patsy, who couldn't figure out what the hell was wrong with me. Of course, that didn't stop her from bugging me to death. Let's go shopping in the

Village; let's invite guys over to your house to play ping pong; let's go to Ships for patty melts. On and on. When I told her I was studying, working on getting good grades for college, she looked at me like I was insane. Lynn, my oldest friend, was so busy getting plastered on vodka-injected oranges, she barely noticed that Cat existed or how much I had changed.

One day I bumped into Patsy and Lynn in the school hallway. They were roaring with laughter and falling all over each other, a sure sign that Lynn had shared her oranges with Patsy.

"How about having some fun after school for a change?" Patsy winked, her arm linked through Lynn's.

"I told you, I have too much homework these days to fool around," I answered.

"Geez, Annie, you're turning into a bookworm," Lynn slurred. "We miss you."

"She's not too busy to hang-out with Cat," Patsy snarled.

"That's different. We're working together on a collage for Mr. Livingston's art class." Although I acted outraged, I felt lonely with my secret. Several times I had considered telling Lynn about Cat, figuring that of all my friends, she'd understand the importance of being free to love whoever you wanted. After all, she'd made it with just about every guy in our class. But I couldn't catch her at a moment when my courage was up and she wasn't sloshed.

I couldn't tell Patsy the truth. When we were younger, we'd had a blast giving teachers a hard time with sarcastic remarks and forged notes. We played practical jokes on our friends, planting whoopee cushions on their desk chairs, and shaking hands with buzzers hidden in our palms. But I was over that kind of brainless entertainment. Currently, Patsy's biggest thrill in life was coordinating her outfits with patent leather shoes and purses, experimenting with her pixie band and tropical lipstick colors. Her future goal was to have a nose job so that she could nab some rich boyfriend. I had been reading *Delta of Venus* by Anais Nin, a writer Patsy had never heard of. Her extracurricular reading list had stopped at *Peyton Place*. I couldn't get her to talk about anything deeper than who had a crush on who. A girl with superficial tastes would never understand what was really important to me.

"Want to meet after school behind the bungalows today?" Cat slipped me a note during third period art.

"I have to be home by four, but yes, I want to," I scribbled back. What else did I want to do for the rest of my life?

I couldn't wait for school to end that day, and after the final bell rang, I raced to my locker, snatched my trig book and drawing pad, and strolled nonchalantly towards the bungalows, whistling "Blowing in the Wind."

Leaning against the deteriorating wooden shack I felt splintered wood threaten to poke through my sheer cotton dress and pierce my skin. With closed eyes, I tilted my face up to the sun, dreaming about the rapturous mo-

ment that was about to happen.

I could hear intermittent, raucous sounds of kids gathering together, then swarming out the gate. When the noise began to fade, I peeked around the corner and saw the last stragglers wander off the playground. My heart sank. Where was she? In the empty silence that followed, I felt sadly alone in the world, defeated. Nothing ever worked out.

"Boo," Cat said, suddenly standing in front of me, wearing a Dodgers baseball cap and tossing a ball in the air. "Our cover," she winked, and pitched it to me. Then she strung her arms around my neck. "I've been aching for this all day."

She kissed me long and slow.

"You're ruining me for life, Cat. I'll never kiss another boy because of you, you know that. I mean I'm through with them. Finished!"

She stepped back and stared at me with those swimming pool blue eyes. "God, you're so cute."

"I wish we could be somewhere private so we could kiss each other all over," I said.

"Sleep over my house tonight," she said after a moment. "My parents will never suspect. Tonight's *Ben Casey*. They get so wrapped up in that show they're oblivious."

My heart felt like it would burst open. I wanted to climb on top of her right there, but I tried to act calm. "Okay. I'll tell my parents we're partners in a history project. My dad will be thrilled not to have to pick me up."

"All right!" she said. "You're a genius."

That night after dinner, my dad agreed to drop me off at Cat's, if he could get back before *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Although I had my license, my parents forbid me to drive their precious Super 8 Oldsmobile at night. "The way you kids carry on with that loud-blasting Elvis Presley music, you could easily goof up and veer off the road," dad insisted. He didn't know the half of it. From my house cleaning money I was saving up to buy Patsy's brother's '56 Chevy. Once I had my own car, Cat and I could go anywhere, do anything we wanted, be free.

"If we're going, let's go!" My father hollered, jiggling his keys.

"Be good, darling," my mother called out as I ran with my heavy load of supplies to the car and hopped in beside my dad. "Don't wear yourself out studying," she said. "Make sure there's good lighting so you don't ruin your eyes. And don't give the Kelly's any trouble..." She was still rambling on with her do's and don'ts when we took off.

"You got everything you need there?" Dad asked, after we had been driving for a few blocks in silence.

"Mr. Elliott wants us to read *all* of these books for our project. We'll be lucky if we finish by dawn. He's a slavedriver."

"Well, later in life you'll appreciate him for motivating you," Dad said, and pulled over to the curb in front of Cat's apartment building. "Okay."

Behave yourself. Do me a favor, would ya, and call your mother in the morning so that she doesn't worry?"

Somehow Cat and I managed to sit through a few comedy shows with her parents, who were stretched out in matching tweed recliners, sipping iced tea. I tried hard to concentrate on *Dick Van Dyke*, but all the funny lines were drowned out by the crunching sounds of Mr. and Mrs. Kelly chomping handfuls of potato chips. Their living room windows were covered with heavy brocade, olive-green drapes that were always closed, even during the day. A wrought-iron crucifix dangled above the TV. Jesus' neck reminded me of the skinned chickens hanging on the wall in Rosen's Butcher shop.

When Cat began yawning, and rubbing her eyes, so did I. "Annie," she said loudly, "we'd better go tackle our homework before we conk out."

"You're right, Cat. I'll hate to miss *Ben Casey*—he's so handsome—but I don't want to fail history either."

With eyes glued to the screen, Mr. and Mrs. Kelly rocked the ice in their narrow glasses and mumbled something about turning off all the lights when we were done studying. Cat and I fled to her bedroom.

My heart was pounding as hard as if I'd run up Mt. Everest. We rested our hands on each other's waist, and hugged tentatively. Suddenly, I felt shy, almost as if we were strangers. And for a split second, I thought about going home.

"Don't worry Annie," Cat said. "I locked the door." Then she yanked back her white chenille bedspread and pulled me onto the narrow twin bed beside her, kissing me deeply, almost violently. As our bodies pushed into each other, my courage grew. We started touching each other in all the places we'd saved for this moment. I let my fingers rise up and this time instead of stopping me, she moved my hand under her pajama top. Slowly, I began to explore her silky skin, arriving at the gentle white slopes of her breasts.

"God, no wonder guys love girls," I said, tears stinging my eyelids.

She put her hands on my butt and like a sex expert, slowly peeled down my pajama bottoms. She must have slipped hers off earlier, because when she got on top of me, she was naked. We settled in a rhythm that came as naturally to us as breathing. Keeping as quiet as possible, moving together, reaching inside each other, we shook free our deepest desires. I knew I was touching her in delicate places no one had ever been before, and this knowledge made me want to cry.

We were really in love now. We tried to hide it at school, but we couldn't avoid blushing when our eyes met in class. Deaf to the teachers' boring lectures, we passed notes, brushed hands, lingered in the hallway, and fidgeted at the drinking fountain. Each morning, we met at my locker, aching with the fever of our secret love. As locker doors slammed around us and kids came and went, chattering about their juvenile concerns, we stood still and burned for each other. I could swear we'd given ourselves away a hundred times, but miraculously, nobody seemed to notice.

One day we rendezvoused at our hideaway behind the bungalows. It was after four, and the playground was completely deserted, so we spread our cardigans onto the ground and lay down side by side in a patch of warm sun. Our bodies intertwined, we became lost in fierce kissing. Then, suddenly, I sensed someone nearby.

I opened my eyes, startled to see two black shoes, the sensible kind my grandmother Sadie wore, planted squarely in front of us. I sprang up with a jackknife twitch and stared straight into the strained face of our Principal, Miss Jasper.

"Girls," she said, "follow me to my office immediately."

I sat frozen, riveted to the straight seams of her nylon stockings and the hem of her drab gray suit. Not until her command registered did I move on rubbery legs along with Cat to Miss Jasper's dark, musty office in the main building. The yellowed shades were pulled down, keeping out the daylight. Of all the people who could have caught us, Jasper was the worst. An old maid of sixty with pasty skin and beady little grey eyes, she looked like she'd never been loved by anybody. Apart from her brisk step, she resembled a corpse. I'd never seen her even crack a smile. And she was notorious at Manning High for being the strictest bitch alive; her list of rules was a mile long.

Now she stood behind her desk, steadily tapped a sharpened pencil on the table top, as if keeping time with her thoughts. Then she cleared her throat and said, "Girls, what you have done is unacceptable. I would have thought you knew that." She gave us a hard stare and continued to use her pencil as a metronome.

"We're sorry Miss Jasper," I began to say, "and we won't ever..."

"Of course, you understand that you have put me in the terrible position of having to report this to your poor parents."

"But, but... please Miss Jasper," I squeezed out, "we weren't..." I looked at Cat, who stood frozen beside me, a single tear skiing down her cheek.

"Of course, they will be shocked and devastated. Do you understand how serious this is? How it could ruin your entire future?"

"Oh yes Miss Jasper, we do," we said in unison, vigorously nodding our heads to get on her good side. I was shaking and my mind was clogged with thoughts of horrible outcomes. If she told my parents, my mother would have a migraine for the rest of her life and my father would kill me. If he didn't kill me, he'd ship me off to the home for incorrigible girls he always threatened me with when we fought. In any case, I thought, I'd never get to see Cat again. And I would have done anything not to lose her.

Jasper began rummaging through her desk drawer, frantically looking for something. She pulled out some official forms and studied them, flipped pages, studied some more, holding her pencil poised over the papers. But she didn't write anything down. And, after a while, she put the forms away.

"I have seen what happens to girls who take these kinds of chances. I'm sorry to say that some wind up in institutions. As a matter of fact, there are

certain professionals... psychiatrists... who even recommend shock treatment to cure girls of this so-called disease."

"Jesus," Cat muttered under her breath, just loud enough for me to hear.

Jasper got up and perched herself on the edge of her desk, legs slightly apart. Maroon lipstick was caked in the corners of her mouth. I felt a wave of nausea and looked away.

"I would hate to see anything like that happen to you. It is something you would never forget or get over," she murmured, crossing and uncrossing her stumpy legs. "I'm worried about you, girls. Deeply worried."

She removed a crumpled handkerchief from her suit pocket and blew her nose. Then, looking up, she said to the acoustic tiled ceiling, "What are you going to do with these two?"

After a long silence, Jasper started talking faster, as if she had just had five cups of black coffee. "Of all the students at Manning High, I never would have expected this behavior from two such intelligent and popular young ladies. Even with strong tendencies, I'd have thought that you were smart enough to hazard your reputation, to risk everything, for a few moments of reckless pleasure. Obviously, you girls have gone completely astray!"

Massaging her brow as if she had a headache, Jasper walked to the window and pulled back a corner of the shade. A bold of late afternoon sunlight hit the brown carpet. Her hand on the window sill trembled as she stood there, her back to us. I wondered what she was looking at outside.

"How many friends do you suppose you'd have left if the word got out?" she finally said in an other-worldly voice, as if she was thinking about something far away. "Clearly very few, if any. People would shun you. Believe me, there would be no turning back."

Then, suddenly she spun around. Her eyes were on fire, her cheeks were flushed and a mysterious smile had appeared on her face. For the first time, she looked alive.

"Girls, perhaps our chance meeting this afternoon wasn't a coincidence! Perhaps it was a sign! I may be just the person to help you, to instruct you, before it's too late."

I didn't know whether to feel relieved or more terrified by her offer and her obvious enthusiasm. I glanced at Cat, who was viciously gnawing at her cuticle. Jasper began marching to and fro once again, her face beet-red. Looking as dehydrated as a dog in search of a water dish, she finally came to a stop in front of Cat.

"Catherine, there is a world of difference between friendship and perversity," she said as she ran a jittery finger along Cat's cheek. "And you must learn the difference now so that later on you can avoid getting into serious trouble."

Cat's eyes were bulging; her face turned chalky white. In my belly I felt the kind of fear I'd felt once before at the age of twelve, when my Uncle

Sammy showed up at my house drunk late one night and actually came onto me.

"We're really sorry, Miss Jasper, okay? And we won't ever do it again," I intervened, nodding my head emphatically, praying to God that I could coax my way out of there, but not without Cat. I wasn't going to leave her here with this weirdo. "You know," I lied, "my mother is expecting us home to babysit while she's at the beauty parlor. So I was wondering if we could go now?"

Without responding, Miss Jasper continued pawing at Cat's stricken face. "Catherine, you must be so confused, with everything all jumbled up inside of you. Of course, hugging a good girlfriend is a perfectly lovely gesture and you should never think otherwise." With this she latched onto Cat's shoulder and pulled her so close there was hardly any space between their two pale faces. "It's fine to embrace one another," she whispered, "but not for too long."

"Please, Miss Jasper, we have to go," I said. A brutal flapping had begun under my rib cage.

"In a minute, young lady," she snapped at me. "I am demonstrating the line that must *not* be crossed! Can't you see that I am trying to help you?" Her eyes filled with tears; her thin lips were quivering. A trickle of sweat ran down her forehead along the side of her face, and little pieces of hair swung loose from the tight gray bun knotted at the base of her neck. This wasn't the Jasper I knew.

I was afraid to even look at her. I wouldn't have been surprised if Cat had fainted the moment Jasper let her go. I felt light-headed, as though a gentle tap could tip me over.

"Come on Cat, we have to go!" I was prepared to grab her and run, whatever it took to get us out of there.

"Friendship is the key, no more, no less, between girls. Anything else will destroy you. That is what I must teach you, and that is why you need to come in and talk with me again. I will do what I can to protect you."

I was about to scream, when Jasper released Cat, stiffened, and padded back to her desk. Standing behind it, she brushed off her suit and wiped her damp face with her handkerchief. Once again, she addressed us both in her bossy Principal's voice.

"But be assured, I will report this transgression to your parents, if you don't comply with my instructions. Agreed?"

"Yes, Miss Jasper." I said, but Cat didn't answer. She just stared straight ahead. I shivered, wondering what else Jasper had in mind.

"Very well then," she said, furiously fanning herself with a manila folder. "Catherine, you will report here tomorrow promptly at three-thirty, at which time we will review what we have discussed today. And, Annie, I will see you later on in the week. Is that clear? In the meantime, it is imperative that you avoid spending time alone together, that is, until we are certain that

you can curb these dangerous urges. And I think it wise not to mention this afternoon to anyone."

"Oh yes, Miss Jasper. We will, I mean, we won't," I offered, knowing that until Cat recovered I'd have to speak for both of us.

When we walked out, my body tingled all over and my ears were hot and throbbing. My eyes squinted against the sudden light, the way they do when I came out of a matinee.

"God, what a pervert!" I said, trying to laugh it off, but the sound got stuck in my throat like a rock.

Cat gave me a hard stare and didn't say a word.

I had a sinking feeling that made me start talking faster than I could think. "God. I can't believe she put her creepy hands all over you. It must have been awful. She's so weird, Cat. But that doesn't mean we are. We just love each other is all. We're nothing like her."

Cat remained silent and when I touched her shoulder to comfort her she cringed and turned away from me. "Don't worry Cat, we'll think of something." The words kept pouring out of me; I felt like I had to keep talking or I'd die. "I won't let anyone hurt you. Please, Cat, talk to me. We have to stick together, right? Okay, the worst that can happen is that she tells our parents but it's two against one, right? We can make up a better story than hers any day. She's such a sicko, I bet our parents will believe us." Really, I didn't. My parents would always believe a teacher, definitely a principal over me. But I was trying to convince myself, too. "We'll say we went behind the bungalow to smoke. We know it's wrong, and we're sorry, but the rest is bullshit. We'll tell them Jasper blew the whole thing out of proportion because she is such a warped old pervert! Maybe they'll get the district to fire her or lock her up."

I kept on talking, watching Cat's ghost-like face; I wanted to bring her back to life, but a black feeling swept through my heart: everything had changed forever and there was nothing I could do.

"She's never going to tell anybody," Cat said in a flat, mean tone. And as soon as she said it, I knew it was true. Jasper would keep the secret and destroy our love.

Cat and I walked home together in the most awful silence, and as we approached the spot where we went our separate ways, I made a last desperate stab at reaching her.

"We're in this together, no matter what, Cat. Remember, I love you and that's all that matters. Call me after dinner and we'll strategize, okay?"

"See ya," she said in a fog and began to drift off.

"CAT!" I yelled, grabbing her arm. As hard as I could, I tried to hold her back, get her to talk to me.

"She said we couldn't..." Cat stalled in mid-sentence. "We can't do anymore." Her facial features looked like they were about to cave in.

"No, Cat, we can't listen to *her*! Please, we've got to stick together. Oh Cat, don't let her screw things up." I was choking back tears.

"I've gotta go," she insisted, and without looking at me, she tore down the empty street, and disappeared around the next corner.

The Grasshopper

by Mary Diane Hausman when I was three

They say my daddy was a grasshopper
Living for the day
Not giving two shakes
for tomorrow.

But Daddy sure did mention
tomorrow a lot.
"Lend me a dollar, Li'l Gal, I'll pay
you back tomorrow."
"Gimme five bucks, Son, you know
I'll give it back tomorrow."

Tomorrow never came.
Daddy, a grasshopper,
played into the fall,
Till winter overtook him.

Wings broken, lungs filled
with the cold air of cancer
He froze, holed up in a VA hospital in Waco.
Comatose, they said.
His jaundiced skin pulled tight
across swollen cheeks,

His Cherokee pride stretched out of whack
While heavy lids slammed shut
over alcohol eyes
Rheumy, slate-blue eyes,
once sharp as the bone-handled
hunting knife he carried.

I was fifteen, but he thought I was five
and he called me by my sister's name
as I stood by his bedside
trying to read his sluggish lips
under the oxygen tent.

I forgot the dollars and the bucks,
and tomorrow.
I remembered what he could not:
That he danced a Texas two-step with me

And proudly watched me dive from
limestone bluffs and swim
out to him in deep water;

That he laughed a lot
when I was small
And he swore more often than not
when I was older.

I remembered his drunken artist hand
Fumbling on used canvas
Trying to paint the dull red pain
out of his life.

My daddy was a simple man
with simple needs:
his drink, his art, his children,
my mother.
All but the last were his to keep.

I left him there, in the oxygen tent
and yesterday
And I went on to tomorrow
to find a way to pay myself back
Out of the trust of memories
My daddy funded.

The Universe

by Mahdy Y. Khiyat

Is a swan
That glides
Gracefully and
Majestically,
Unaware that
Its feet will
Entangle in the
Net of Time; its
Feathers will
Scatter across
The green-rimmed
Blue expanse,
Body drifting slowly
Toward the
Bottomless throat
Of the Grand Designer.

What I Remember Is

by Mary Winters

they hated it
a good idea at first?
hayrides for the city folk who'd
pick a box of apples

The farm family couldn't abide it
the clomping stumbling *littering* hordes
the shrieking kids in hot pink
hats among the lovely old trunks

At the end of the season the farmers'
voices cracking with misery
the shutters on the farmhouse
sprung to close like a trap
on prey that wouldn't protest

What I remember is
they hated it
hayrides for the city folk
a good idea at first

how to enter a distracted autumn

(previously published in Mid-March '97 issue (#4) of *Lucid Moon*)

by Brent Emerson

the sharp, sudden onrush of exotic spring air
into September

is to be
surprised by the sensual,
friendly smile of a beautiful stranger

your eyes awake with wonder

the hungry kiss their mouth might form
in your contemplation
is not unlike the fresh, cold pierce of
this amazed atmosphere

so you'll need

nights of distant brightpoints through car windows
days of redundant grey urban legitimacy

at the dusk bridge, so many headlights in a misty rain;
the absurd intimacy of a crowd of people who have never met,
all holding hands

you'll need

a precisely measured mindful of
menstruating Catholic girls,
singing in the subway

(echoing voice of rough honey)

and what if there's a bomb on the next train?

endsong

by Wayne Cresser

persephone's car backfires
when she first starts it up
and that is not a summer sound
nor is the music that comes from
within it
ephemeral voices
descending
sweet, sad,
elegiac

she drives by my hedges now
listening to those voices
no longer walks
or stops to talk
about the summer, gardens,
or the rain

i quit trimming my hedges
let them grow wild, unsightly
until i can't see the street
or the sun going out
or the days dwindling down
to hurry-up darkness

gradually
the music will fade too
as car windows edge up
to keep out the cold
and the window glass clouds over
and darkens
with her breathing

End of Power

by Mahdy Y. Khair

Shaking
The bone fragments
On the wooden tray,
The archeologist says:
"Meet the King of Kings,"
As a column of dust
Rises and swirls away.

The Time Will Be

by Carol Carpenter

She —
Walking across waxed linoleum floors.
Reaching for the princess phone.
Talking long distance through wires.
Yelling at the boy tracking in mud.
Hanging up.
Wondering what to fix for dinner.
Pushing the phone buttons again.
Juggling the skillet in her left hand.
Listening to the busy sound.
Breaking the connection.
Punching now another number.
Hearing another woman starting dinner.
Saying nothing.

She —
Waiting for the sound of his car.
Waiting for the phone to ring.
Waiting for someone to contact her
About something she should have done
Yesterday, or can do tomorrow or next week.

She —
Knows she must stop waiting.
Knows she is forty now.
Knows the mortgage is paid.
She sits still
Waiting for
Something to happen.

Delivery

by Carol Carpenter

Days passed hang
heavy on my calendar.
Pregnant women
outwait due dates.
Edges curl.
Red magic-markers months
newborn pink, fresh
from mother's womb.
Stretch marks, stitches
across bulging bellies
shrink now.
Years are so much
afterbirth.

Mirror Image/Mirror Image

by Mary Kennan Herbert

I try to conjure up our well-limned moon;
your slant of sunlight, my burst of poetry —
I too worship this mirror each afternoon,
and I admire whatever you saw in me.
Very intently this face returns my stare;
my wicked flesh reflects your/my hungry grin.
You know me too well, too soon; you made me bare
willful breasts, my heart, and sleek, nude bones within —
it's been such sweet sport to peel away my face,
showing my skull in all its naked glory.
Compliance/refusal comes wrapped in black lace;
I'm saying yes/no, while spreading my story —
it opens wide to accommodate our lies,
while you/I match our smiles, our wit, our surprise.

Beads on a String

by Leslie Schenk

Now is a whirlpool
spiraling down
into past.

Now is a fountainhead
whose rivers flow
backwards from here.

Now is the prow
of our ship
slicing forward
through when.

Now is time itself
while still fluid.

*

Now is hacked off
by our minds into
fragments of then.

Now falls to pieces,
moments, like
beads on a string.

Now's particles
fling themselves deep,
like grain, like seed.

Now stays now in
the oyster of memory,
grit for our pearls.

No Perfect Crossing

by Errol Miller

All my lives
were young ones.
Perhaps that is why I
do not understand.
I am crossing a bridge
you have crossed before.
So do not quarrel with me
about the way I do it.
I am sure that you made
no perfect crossing.

Couvade

by Carl Gottesman

Down beneath waves within waves,
thick hair drags me down, nersu
no croce, hearing still
beneath olive leaves, grinding,
the press turning, no foot

at the wheel, no hand on the oar,
and out of the press, rising
from the wave, the trill
of cicadas, earth cries ...
I arch and stretch forth

as my wife cries in labor
to kiss the wall behind...

48 hours, 64 hours, 72 hours, yes, blood,
no end of blood, and, somehow, we begin to laugh,
the midwife bending over, tears
in her eyes, on her lips
the laughter of the seed press
and sea birds ...

"Out there, on the mountain,
you must ..." she begins to hiss,
still laughing, and I know
she means, out there, tomorrow,
when I lift my sickle against seed grain, still

I must rise up and howl with that voice
I've learned to mock, as it
mocks, that death may lose its way
among the scattered seeds
hammered beneath stone, lose its breath on sea waves

and settle on this life
barren as a mountain.

The Wagon Bed

by B. Z. Niditch

You wrapped me bare-boned
inside a summer straw mattress
light cluttered up an hour
on the sun-cracked towns
amid the box springs
of a rustling roadbed
with an awning and ark
where lovers cannot sleep
beneath ladder-back slats
spilling tongues of milk
animal hides and candles.

Up the clove hitched ropes
life pulls in the ruins
of a wagon's fluffy down bed
through the shrieking notches
which touch our skins with pain.
Towns we pass vanish like trees
and the procession of a child
in the choked chill mornings
rock now on a cushioned memory.

in the waiting room
trunkfish float in a glass bowl
nursed by a gurgling plastic tube
and warm hum of a motor.

in keeping my love for her unfamiliar
i shall let go.
let go because she has no color,
no shape, no face now.
never a voice.
let go because she hears me
and is omniscient.
i feel her terrible knowing,
her lack of elegy.

let go because i cannot smell her,
but only the magazines.
the bright intoxicating ink,
luxurious, exotic,
like the perfume samples,
the medicated music.

i bring nothing to this.
no lillies or casseroles
or small leafy plants.
only a ripsaw and a gaff
to cleave and thresh.

i feel her terrible knowing,
her lack of elegy.

we do not recognize each other in this.

she walks like she is carrying something.
her beige linen and black shoes
look unhandled.
she smells warn and antiseptic,
swobbed.
her ropy fingers
cool in my hand

their faces smudged,
i look at the edges of things.

a woman in a white pinafore
discharges our sour figures
into the yellow heat.
our mouths heavy as marble.

at the end of everything,
i cannot lessen it.
despite her lack of elegy,
respect for a dead child.

Rejection Blues

by Nelson James Dunford

When one writes fiction and poetry (and an occasional literary essay) as a vocation (or even as an avocation), one realizes early on that many little-magazine editors are incompetent. This conclusion is obvious in that one's work is so often returned with a printed rejection slip. Since one only submits pieces that are clearly superior to the usual drivel, the fact that this superiority is seldom recognized speaks clearly enough of the readers at small presses.

No, my rejection blues do not come from such cases of inability to recognize the important writers of tomorrow until tomorrow has arrived and they have already been recognized. And of course once a writer's genius has been recognized, mainstream publishers pay real money for his work, so he no longer submits to the university quarterlies.

Nor do my rejection blues come from the somewhat rare receipt of well meant constructive criticism. Seldom, if ever, is a valid point made in one of these personal comments, although very rarely a minor spelling or punctuation correction (marked on the manuscript) is appropriate and appreciated.

There was a time when I muttered under my breath at all markings on my masterpieces, and I still do when corrections are not corrections at all but rather the introduction of errors where there had been none. Nowadays, though, changes are easily incorporated and the affected pages reprinted with very little effort, inasmuch as the whole piece has been saved on a floppy disk.

What galls me inordinately, though, is the wanton defacing of copy in an act of utter carelessness not even meant to be helpful. Over the years, I have all too often had to print off fresh scripts of works before submitting to other magazines because of the following types of mutilations:

- ☞ Missing pages. Not always are these the easy to explain first or last, or even consecutive ones. A random three or four may be gone from the middle. Easier to correct (because no reprinting is required) is a shuffling with all leaves still there.
- ☞ Pages cropped by a letter-opening machine. Only a slice at a corner, usually, nearly parallel to one of the edges, not even eliminating text. Unfortunately such mutilation goes through all the sheets and necessitates a complete reprinting if the manuscript is to be presentable for its next submission.

☞ Tears in pages, apparently introduced by careless turning. This has happened less often since I started printing on heavier paper than I once used. However, the reduction in the number of careless rips has cost me in increased postage. I long ago abandoned onion skin because one too many readers complained — with justification — that the print on the underlying page showed through and made the current one difficult to read. The tear problem, though, has forced me to even greater weights and larger mailing fees.

☞ Tears on pages — I would like to think because my skill as a writer had aroused lachrymose emotions. Why, then, though, had the piece been rejected? I suppose because the little stains were merely from water incidentally dripped from some source other than the reader's eyes. So much for my self-puffing about my ability to affect!

☞ Coffee and/or food spills. I learned many years ago not to eat or drink at my desk when I was handling material that must not be soiled. When I was a ghost writer in the employ of a major book publisher, I once spilled coffee all over pages that were ready to go off for photo-offset printing. In those days, such sheets were prepared on a typewriter that had some fairly sophisticated features, such as a capability to right justify. However, what had been typed was not yet, in that transitional period of the printing arts, stored on a floppy, or even on a magnetic tape. At least my manuscripts that have been spotted with comestibles can be restored easily, provided there have been no disk failures.

☞ Folds introduced in preparation for insertion into a letter envelope by an editor who hadn't noticed that my SASE was a 9 x 12. In this category also fall unsightly crinkles on front and back pages, apparently caused by careless insertion into my return envelope. Then too there are creases caused by corners of pages having been turned down to mark a reader's place. Was he off to get a cup of java that, fortunately this time, did not end up on my manuscript?

☞ Extraneous scribbles of a pen or pencil, perhaps held in the ready to make emendations (that in the end were not made). If such marks ever had artistic merit, I might be amused. They are never even, though, interpretable as criticism, let alone as art. The doodles I have had on returned pieces were invariably

little more than hen scratches.

- ☞ Smudges from a seldom or never wiped-off desk top. Being a slob myself, I sympathize with those who spoil pages in this way. I know too, from having been an editor myself, that that line of work lends itself to the accumulation of books and newspapers and magazines and the like, often making it impossible for a cleaning crew to wash desk tops.
- ☞ Dirt looking as though it had come from a floor, this suspicion being confirmed sometimes by the print of a heel or sole, or the track of a chair's wheel. I can understand the accident of a gust of air wafting a sheet of paper from a desk. I am less than sympathetic, though, with the kind of clumsiness that results in the page being stepped on or run over during retrieval.
- ☞ Fingerprints, not always only on an edge held for turning, but often all over the sheet. There should be a law requiring the same of little-magazines as of restaurants. Every literary publisher would be required to post in his lavatory a sign warning:

EMPLOYEES MUST WASH HANDS
BEFORE RETURNING TO WORK

- ☞ Bloodstains, probably from paper cuts. I have, though, built fantasies about these blemishes. Had my writing driven the reader to a bloody suicide? Or perhaps to murder? Or had he only slit the throat of his beloved pet cat, sacrificing that creature to the gods and goddesses who had inspired my art?
- ☞ Once, there was a yellow stain that had soaked through several pages. It smelled distinctly of urine. Whether this was meant as a critical comment or was merely the accident of a dog or a small child I do not know.

The list is far from complete, but it is full enough to give the reader a fair idea of the lack of care taken by many members of little-magazine staffs. Therein lie the true rejection blues. Unfortunately, if there were a form letter from a periodical that had been confronted with an accusation of manuscript mutilation, it would likely read as follows:

Dear Author:

The damaged manuscript we returned to you was damaged when we received it. We regret any inconvenience your own carelessness may have caused you.

Ebb's Porch

by Maurice Ebbs, Jr.

Tides whale that reaping different tale.
A sloppy back porch where I sat for minutes
Now a creative room of thoughts for hours.
The roof was still here.
Only the dark colors are erased.
Cold, Cold, air vanished to two oak walls.
A new room of positive thinking.
A meditation device drug that was calming.
Bring on failure, I can take it.
Genuine genius was positive in that room.
Lonely never in that room.

Do Unto Others...

by Nicholle D. Gaudet

I'm numb
Numb like you taught me to be
Numb when I saw your fear
Numb when I felt your anger
When I witnessed your ignorance
Heard your sympathy
Read of your pity
Talked of your shame
I'm bruised
Bruised like you taught me to be
Bruised when I felt your hand
Bruised when I felt your fury
Tasted your tears
Witnessed your regret
Heard your apology
Read of your abandonment
Talked no more
I'm blank
Blank like you taught me to be
Blank like you taught me to forget
Blank when I knew you didn't care
When I knew you weren't really there
When you left me with my mind
in your hands
When you used my body
without my mind
I'm angry
Angry like you never guessed I would be
Angry at what you showed me
Angry at what you said to me
The way you treated me
so carelessly
And now it's time
to teach you.

Return Me

*by R.A.
Southern*

Return me to the Bazooka Double
Bubblicious Gummie Bear Days—

To the days of Emerald Country—
And those
Mornings feeding us with a
Silver
Spoon

When Sweat and timely Death
Were the only receipts for a
Loving life—

Before the
Burgundy bitter dry
Wine moments, crimson with
Crime

When all needs are
Given and the
Last game
in
Green—

Played . . .

Just A Little Piece

by Elijah J. Graves

An entire life lost in a flicker.	
Hope that there is a life entailed.	A glimmer.
Delicate and fragile to the touch,	Held in some balance.
Tangible to a deathworn heart.	but there.
By a candle or the darkness I have waited.	A healing awaited.
Another pain long passes and forgotten.	Lonely.
With its darkness it rides away.	Slipping.
Some days remind one of the past.	There is laughter.
Another pain long passed and forgotten.	Days of pain.
Into oceans of sight I wander for moments.	Free.
It is yours and mine for the good of now.	Precious time.
Another pain long past and forgotten.	Another time.
	Thanks to you.

Irises

by Leslie Schenk

So long boring,
mere spikes of the one green,
in own sweet time
surging with a sexuality
not unlike tumescence,
in collective pubertal awakening
suddenly climax into flowers,

labially vaginal and phallic at once,
since fold back and thrust forward
petal lips and petal tongues,
in colors as complex
as heady perfumes
you expect but detect not,
force out one wet sticky
bubble of a word "now",
in some orgasmic gasp,

and immediately go limp,
tatter off into drooping husks
of this year's annual attempt
to match some painted Japanese screen
(which surely came first, nature
in passionate pursuit thereafter),
all ungatherable
exercises for our eyes'

irises,

for focusing mechanisms
of our camera minds.

Tomatoes

by Carol Carpenter

The poems I do not write
are crammed in my head
like so many overripe tomatoes
bleeding into each other,
dripping, unsynchronized,
out of the bottom of the wooden crate
that warps and swells and rots,
giving birth to white worms
who lap up the juices
of the words I cannot write.

Lifting

by Cindy L. Walker

Too hot for cover tonight, it
is late July and I
am naked on your lap.

You forgo the rocking and we
are so damp we lift the finish
from the hard oak chair.

Even the curtains are limp
around the humid air choking
in the screens and all is still—

But tips of fingers playing
touch and go across my back,
down my thigh.

I count 1,000 departures, long for
lifts between tickles or rare tastes
of oceans beading down your neck.

A Painful Choice

by Errol Miller

Sharing the guideon is painful.
There is room but for two hands.
If you stumble, I fall, too.

Why must we hurt?
Why can't we take turns?
But who would carry
the guideon, and who
would hurt?

The Basement Horse

by Cindy L Walker

Sometimes in the hot June, I am lured
to the cool mustiness of the cellar,
I settle down with the cold-blooded dust
that blankets unpacked antiques, my father's
workbench, heavy with projects.

It is coolest in the back right corner
where the bulb has burnt out, where the
basement horse has stopped rocking. I
remember holding those cracked plastic
reigns, the feel of the saddle,
the unpredictable springs.

It is eerie to look into his paint-chipped
eyes, rhythm absent from his body, so still
that unshelved books, lonely for fingers
between pages, are balanced at his side.

I am suddenly aware of the bolt of days, the
years that have passed since I laughed on his
back, when change seemed to be a prologue
to the rest of your life, not the impulsive
ride of daily transitions.

When I ascend the June heat will be upon me
like a sequel, leaving behind things meant
to be stored, like the basement horse,
not forgotten, just now without use.

Beethoven vs. the Exclusion Principal

(previously published in Spring '97 issue of *Slightly West*)

by Brent Emerson

the night has come;
i leave my love.

(her date is in the bathroom)

his tuxedo is a little tight,
but he can stand it, i hope.

anyway, after their giddy
all-dressed-up first sight

(she'll blush for him, i'm sure,
in her new dress)

after all the flowers have changed
hands and hands
are busy holding each other
on the soft walk to the river or
later, set aswing in the lowlight music

after the danceflush fades away
he won't have to wear it anymore;

her hands will see to that.

leaving the city, alone,
mine are headdown shrugged
into their pockets.

i'm surprised to hear
a lonely subway guitarman

(for it echoes blue and
moonlight fresh
through the station)

he's playing the Ode to Joy.

(you can guess:
my look up
is a madman smile,
a broadness unmatched

by any bed)

Drowning Angel-extended

by Suchot Sunday

I was fishing one day
when I caught an angel.
She was snared in my hook
and bleeding and swearing,
A tiny little shit she was
Kind of transparent-like
and shining,
I untangled her
as gently as I could
which was hard at the time
because she was a fighting bitch
and wasn't helping me at all.
I asked her how she fell
but she ignored me, instead
concentrating
on wringing out her paper wings,
And of course, I being me,
stated the obvious:

"Silly angel, don't you know
you can't fly if you wings
get wet?"

To which she glared at me
and replied,

"I'm tired of flying,"

and jumped back in the water.

The Skunk

by Mary Winters

does not care if I think it's
interesting
or cute
or manifesting something or other that proves
or disproves
something or other about animal behavior

It does not care if I wonder if it's
thinking human thoughts
or having human feelings especially
love and curiosity
if I wonder if it's using
tools and language if only we
observe it properly
the skunk just doesn't care

It strolls across the yard
on the exact same diagonal
at the exact same time
six p.m. sharp the same
slalom course between dandelions



**Fury of a Man With Clock Hands
Who's Slow in Grasping
and Cannot Weigh a Moment**

by Kelly Washbourne

My hands are those of a clock, useless, they cannot grasp.
I feel I am a sundial in the everlasting rain, —waiting for shadows—
I point to imaginary numbers
that I see taking form like fledgling dinosaurs from the egg,
the imaginary egg,
and I count and recount imaginary things, because I can.
In my view is a brooding sea who mistakes my glances,
and who drowns me
by ignoring me.
Mistook! Mistook!
So I annoy them all, all of you, chanting away seconds,
 letting my identity and my beard
 flow, pool, flood! as long
 as Noah's years,
 my temper as short as Cain's remorse.

I feel History inside me —kicking in some kind of womb of the Mind—
I sense clocks and calendars accepting me as their leader, their lover, their
faith,
the hours and the years of every man,
woman and child go into heat,
I start my ticking again, and set to digesting the whole human race I have
swallowed.

I, the bastard son of Time! I shuck seconds like a mad farmer —Ha!
 It is Evolution who is mad!
 —and nash their spent corpses in my teeth,
 gargling some demonic
 hymn.

I see a generation in each drop of my blood, and on the hour I whoop and
howl
 with a billion timepieces that echo their atavistic roar across
the land.
They look to me as their liberator, but my power is delicate,
 it is right in my hands only, my clock hands that cannot feed
me but which feed
 the Passing.

My mind is a Pearly Instant —stay back, you!—
 it cannot be grasped, nor grasp.

When I have suspended all time in my tracks,
I will swirl my story out of its socket!
The heavens, too, in frozen deference, will drink thirstily
at my generous springs
 until I have sated them that made them mine...

The Peace Process

by Kevin Carey

Mother found it for me,
during a family holiday of my childhood.
She tried to straighten the spokes
shinned them with a burlap cloth
and oiled the wheels.
It had been kind and I remember
bouncing over the dust filled streets
cluttering now by red faced bandits
stealing kindness.

I've tied my karma to the blue padded seat
and it will last until just the right moment
and forever.

Mother would be proud
to know her son is riding to his glory,
a bent-spoked messenger
peddling flames.

Old Shoes

by Elija J. Graves

So we left him there,
Alone in the darkness.
And he cried,
Clutching to a tattered memory.
A single chair.
Alone.
He used to sit under a willow tree.
There,
In the darkness by the water,
Smiling at all he could see.
And scorn that he should smile at all.
Still he sat,
Darkness to dawn crept,
And fell,
A victim of his own cage.

by Bobbie Saunders

The shadow
 of youth
 long
 forgotten
 passed
 before
 me
 like
 a pedestrian
 darting
 across
 a dark
 highway,
 his footsteps
 heard
 only
 by angels,
 his being
 furtive
 and
 longing,
 his purpose
 known
 only
 by a
 benevolent
 moon —

Three Aimless Minds On a January Night

by Mike Devigne

"Dreary Days have gone unsung," they agree. Three aimless minds on a January night. Suffering actors in a seemingly artless masque of insane teen villains and heros. Straying youths and pagan gods of this present day drug music subculture. Roaming street walkers and tenants of dark nameless alleys where debauching thieves and street worm whores mingle and wed. And hear the urban wild cry-the thin tin can cats pawing through rainbow gasoline streams of bloody refuse and broken glass. And the three aimless minds walk the square amongst bustling crowds of mystic seers and caring old men chewing gum and selling the daily papers to the daily clones. Folk witches howl and strum away to enchant concocting six string spells for uncaring passerby's. Simple old men stand on the corners and dream of Doris Day. Simple old men caneing playful devils playing tricks with twirling street steam seething and hissing. Three aimless minds weave up streets laid from cobblestone quarries while Ornette dimly toots a sax in some distant corner. They weave through the rush-hour of everyday folk and gangsters who roll mechanical vehicles roaring and sometimes crashing at sinister velocities. "If all roads lead to Rome, then this must be Rome" one says. Roads filled with the trucks transporting all the ingredients for this grand urban dessert.

And on these January nights the three aimless minds get high and drive the hard streets of the square. On the radio Dylan rambles on his rhymes and blues, and there's a flaming half moon aimed down at the city lights like Armageddon. You've got to respect a scene like that. And they do respect it 'cause on these nights they're obscure poets and philosophers, infantile and brilliant both at once. One sits in the back seat 'cause he forgot to call shotgun, and he finger paints on the back window covered in frost. Like a perverted child's twisted scribbles of crayon and insanity. A diligent finger painting that would make even Bob Dylan on the radio cry from its sheer beauty. The aimless mind mumbles at the wind his grade school dreams of fame. The galling wind responds with a thousand pardons to ageing dieing children and a prayer for hungry bowels. And oh frustration you enchantress! Tears and cataclysms stream from his eyes. And he cries for all the pharaohs and kings and ancients of whom he'll never learn about. He lies in the back seat clutching himself as if he was his own lover while all of this runs through his watery mind.

They park the car to journey by foot the hard streets of the square. Here? - In the square? A place where frantic caravans of busy lives careen. A place where fanatic prophets deliver humdrum tirades on the very injustice that here rests upon. Call the square a freak show carnival of

ageless hobos, mystic lunatics, carefree youths dreaming of trapeze artistry, pushy vendors dancing tightropes to convince, and them. They are the three aimless minds. Three aimless minds wandering the midnight January circus. And at this circus they meet the lines of romantic teens and drag queens with bodies pierced and numbed by powders, sands and pills waiting in line to dance and dream in the \$5 dollar story that pounds and flashes inside. Cheap techno and transvestites' euphoric laughter haunts local discotheques and psychedelics in a night light fantasy.

An aimless mind, he sees the music move and breath as a voluptuous creature. He feels it like tangled fish in his lung. He dreams of the naked beauty of music and imagines it as a maiden he could touch and smell and love. And if music was a woman his love would turn sick as an angry black child born dieing. If music was a woman he would gouge out her precious eyes to carry like pearls in his pocket. And he'll say, "In my pocket I'll hold thee like mined jewels from gouged earth." And the hands and fingers of maiden music...those hands with their sheathing mixture of stone blood care. And the dancing fingers of maiden music...those enamel configurations paying homage to all fools. An aimless mind obsessed with the beauty of maiden music. He'll amputate her hands to hold when he wants, and he'll cry at his destruction, "and oh dismembered hands, cup the amiable raindrops that prey upon the fall." And from this another rock star is born. Out pours its life as an infant bathing in afterbirth stinking of blood and waste. The aimless mind and his love of music. She asked and he told her that he loved music more, because it would never lie and it would never cheat, then he turned on the radio.

But in the day the aimless minds are made mortal by all the Sigfrieds, Bertolts, and Ike Eisenhowers. The day, fruiting mortality and stinting pages of carefree fiction bare no treasures for the life high youths. The day, the Antichrist bathes in a caustic scent of daylight where beggars beg and where we all kill art. In street gutters, rivers run deep with drowning hobos' tears. A face of tired lines clutches his bag of trash amidst the crowd of successful assassins of art beneath the sun. A beggar chants ancient hymns to his youth on lonely cobblestone streets....an ode to the innocent. An aimless mind ponders the injustice. Oh the romantic brutality of it all! To steal the bread of unjust foes 'cause shyness cries of whispered secrets and unjust secrets cry of shying foes. But you'd better watch out, 'cause fat Boston cops in movies are for real. If only the world was of raging Marxists and visionaries, he thinks. Thieves dream of infamy stealing and keeping secrets from reality. A thief-an aimless mind. But its all good and its all fine 'cause all aimless minds are artists musicians and thieves.

Birch sticks,
rake tines gripped
in dark tidal motions

rustle as the clothes
of children
move across a drill field —

tidal motions.

A black horse carries the earth
in his belly —
barred theatre windows

reflect farewell gestures
watched like a fire fight
from dark windows.

The moment, falling wilderness,
rivers, snow
over everything —

sky flecks churning
around birch tines,

the great stone's momentum
renders further search, devotion,
an indolent fiction.



To Each

by Carol Carpenter

Sullen talks,
The couch and car,
divided dividends,
no animosity,
or so they said,
to each other.

The children, too, split
Between Saturdays and Sundays
springs and summers;
even the cold death
months considered
and ignored, until later
when they discussed
other matters that required
more words,
their complete attention
to all details.

She and he got
through it all,
and were glad,
or so they said,
to each other.

by Brent Emerson

accidents of purpose
smooth and tangled

like jungle vines
of softened mind
the skin, so full
flows warm

quick, the flutter of skin-sprinkled starlight
lust and questions
in the coffee-black night

*dear, chronology and hunger
will never sleep together
as we do*

(the shortness of your breath, my love
the length our matched bodies lie
your lips, your tongue must hunt now
still, uncertain are your open eyes;

by Leslie Schenk

Tourists preserve in snapshots
iron conceit they grin before,
of slaves clanging out hours
over square and lagoon,
while pigeons perform live wheels.

Alone aware each hammer-blow
counts off our time, yours, mine,
these meager moments in sun,
and will count after portraits fade,
I am still flesh, jealous of metal.

1912 Textile Worker's Strike Slogan

by Gina M. Tabasso

Although I don't know anything
about mill lofts, mothering,
starvation, true toil or battle
I do know about bread and how
to make it, paska with raisins.
I know about roses, the ones
my mother grows in the flowerbed
and those my boyfriend brings
from the florist. I remember
Mrs. Hetky, grandma's neighbor,
and her prize-winning coral-
colored peace roses. I remember
the darkened kitchen when my mother
went back to work full-time.
We never ate breakfast or had meals
together again. I know radiance,
the beauty of the day and song.
Somehow, they are all the same—
simple things like my parakeet
making music to wild-sill sparrows,
the cat dropping milk jug rings
at my feet and pawing me to throw them,
sleeping in on the weekend,
buying a new tea cup, making coffee
with Irish cream on a cold day.
I know about refusal to sweat,
to drudge, to be idle, to be put down.
And I rise through the years to 1912,
the year after my grandmother was born,
to be near these women
who wove me something warm,
baked bread and grew roses.

About the Contributors

Kevin M. Carey is a film maker and a writer. He lives in Manchester, MA with his wife Elizabeth and his two children, Kevin and Michaela.

Carol Carpenter's stories and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Indiana Review*, *Confrontation*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Yankee*, and *Quarterly West*. She received the 1997 Richard Eberhart Prize for poetry. Formerly a writing instructor and journalist, she now works for a training company and lives in Livonia, MI.

Wayne Cresser says that he would like to be a tugboat captain and he would like you all to be his crew, but instead he teaches English to the disinclined at a small New England Collage.

Michael Devigne recently dropped out of Tufts University to concentrate more on his never ending escapade to crash and burn and tear the world in too.

Nelson James Dunford is retired from being a journalist, ghost writer, editor, application and systems programmer, and miscellaneous other drudgeries. In time not now spent with his grandchildren and crewing on an old friend's sailboat, he has returned to writing short stories and poetry, and early passion of his.

Maurice Ebbs, Jr. was born the son of a Vietnam veteran on a US base in Augsburg, Germany. He has been published in the *Conservative Review*. He is currently working on a Master of Psychology at Cameron University.

Susan Efros is a fiction writer, editor, and creative writing consultant. Her work has been published in *Ascent*, *Christopher Street*, *Yellow Silk* and is forthcoming in *Amelia*, *Paris Transcontinental*, and *Footwork: The Pater-son Literary Review*. "Girls Gone Astray" is the title story of her recently completed collection of short stories.

Brent Emerson is a senior at Brown University (concentrating in philosophy and mathematics) and edits the poetry department of *black street, yellow moon*, and irregularly appearing arts ejournal at <http://www.netspace.org/~bsym>. His work has recently appeared in *Slightly West*, *Clerestory* and *A Poet's Attic Quarterly*.

Nicholle D. Gaudet is a full-time student at Fitchburg State College. She has had poems published previously by the National Library of Poetry.

Carl A. Gottesman is a graduate of the University of Iowa and is currently a high school teacher in Manhattan.

Elijah Graves was born on April 14, 1978. Sometime between then and now he started dreaming, and hasn't stopped since. Soon afterwards he started writing to express dreams and feelings on paper for others to understand. "It is my hope to die having written enough to start the world dreaming again."

Mary Diane Hausman, a native Texan of Cherokee ancestry, is a poet, writing teacher and painter. Her poetry appears nationwide and she will be included with Maya Angelou and Rita Dove in the upcoming *Unsilenced: The Spirit of Women*, by Mollie Cox Bryan.

Mary Kennan Herbert teaches writing and writes poetry in Brooklyn, NY. Originally from the Midwest, she has taught at several colleges and universities in the New York area. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and other periodicals in the US and abroad.

Mahdy Y. Khaiyat has a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Master of Arts in Political Science from the University of California, and currently works for the Los Angeles Times. He started writing poetry in 1989. His poems have appeared in literary magazines in England, Finland, Australia, Argentina, Japan, Belgium, France, Canada, and the United States.

Barbara Lynn-Bolton is in the BSA program at UMass Lowell. She is the mother of a nine-year-old boy and lives with him, a dog, and a cat in Wakefield, MA. Apart from being an artist, Barbara is also a poet.

Errol Miller was published recently in the *American Poetry Review*, *Nedge*, *The New Renaissance*, *the Aureorean*, *Weber Studies*, *The Pannus Index*, etc... A large collection, "Downward Guide" is forthcoming from the *Pannus Index Press* in Northampton, MA. Two chapbooks, "Blue Atlantis" and "This Side of Chicago" are forthcoming from *Encircle Publications* in Sagamore Beach, MA.

B. Z. Niditch is the artistic director of the original theatre. His work appears in *The Anthology of Magazine Verse and Yearbook of American Poetry*, *Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Art*, *The Literary Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *International Poetry Review*, *Jejune* (Czech. Republic).

Ellen Persio is a freelance copywriter who lives in Brookline.

Bobbie Saunders was born in Cincinnati and graduated from Emory

University in 1971 and began working for the U.S. Army in 1972. Her poems have appeared in such publications as *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Icon*, *13th Moon*, *Fox Cry*, *Perceptions*, *The Villager*, and *The Plastic Tower*. A collection of her poems entitled "Illusions" was published by Wyndham Hall Press in 1990.

Leslie Schenk returned to his writing career mid-1993 after a long hiatus in overseas UN service, and has already had 54 essays, poems and stories accepted for publication in US/UK literary reviews (*Potpourri*, *Kettering Review*, *World Literature Today*, *Short Story International*, *Poetry Today*, *Chapman*, etc...), plus three literary competition First Prizes.

R. A. Southern, a native of Massachusetts, attended Syracuse University and presently attends the University of Massachusetts Lowell where he intends to complete a degree in English and Philosophy. His work has appeared in the university literary magazines *Review* and *Spectrum*. He has worked as a correspondent for *The Lowell Sun* and *The Methuen Journal* and currently serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *Connector*, UMass Lowell's student-run newspaper. While on active duty in the Army, he served in Korea and Colorado.

Suchot Sunday says only the following: "poet. her. 20. toronto. happy. bye. " With a P.S. saying she would like to thank God and Courtney.

Gina M. Tabasso, a poet with her M.A. in English, has won numerous awards and has been published in *Mangrove*, *The MacGuffin*, *Mid-American Review*, *Slant*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *The Northern Reader*, *Black Buzzard Review*, and others. She is a Cleveland Poetry Cooperative Board Member, Associate Editor of a construction trade newspaper and a part-time instructor at a community college.

Cindy L. Walker is a graduate student at Emerson College working toward her M.A. in Writing and Publishing. Her poetry has been published in *The Lamron* and *Equinox Literary Journal*. She hopes to eventually teach writing and create her own educational magazine.

Kelly Washbourne is a poet and translator at UMass Amherst. His work has appeared in *Voices International* and *The Literary Review*. In December he plans to research Amazonian literature in northern Brazil.

Mary Winters works as a poverty lawyer. Her poems have appeared in academic reviews and the small press since 1992. She was a Pushcart Prize nominee in 1994, and a featured poet in the 1995 *Palanquin Poetry Series*. Her book, *A Pocket History of the World*, was published by Nightshade Press in 1996.

